Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, Vol. XXXII

PRICES IN MECCA DURING THE MAMLŪK PERIOD

BY

RICHARD T. MORTEL

(King Saud University, Riyadh)

The political, social and economic history of western Arabia during the medieval period still remains *terra incognita* for the great majority of Islamicists, in spite of the intrinsic importance of the subject and the existence of a corpus of first-rate source materials. The goal of this article is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the economic history of Mecca through a detailed study of the available information regarding the prices of cereal grains and other foodstuffs there during the Mamlūk period. So that the maximum advantage may be derived from the discussion, it will be preceeded by a short outline of the political history of Mecca during Mamlūk times, as well as the salient features of its economy.

I. A Brief Account of the History of Mecca during Mamlūk Times

Towards the close of the 6th cent. A.H./beginning of the 13th cent. A.D., Qatāda b. Idrīs, a Ḥasanid Sharif from the town of Yanbuʿ, midway between Madīna and the Red Sea coast, succeeded in taking control of the Amirate of Mecca, after having deposed Mukthir b. ʿĪsā, the last representative of the Ḥasanid dynasty known as the Hawāshim. The preceeding half-century had witnessed the gradual deterioration of political and social conditions in Mecca, mainly due to internecine conflict between rival Hāshimid factions which had led, in turn, to several attempts by the Ayyūbids of Egypt to restore order in the Ḥijāz, ensure the safety of the Muslim pilgrims to Mecca and Madīna, and bring the nominally independent Amirate of Mecca directly under their sovereignty[1].

1) For the Hawāshim, see G. Rentz, "Hawāshim," in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd. ed.; Richard Mortel, *al-Aḥwāl al-siyāsiyya wa'l-iqtiṣādiyya bi-Makka fi'l-ʿaṣr al-Mamlūkī* (Riyadh: King Saud University Libraries, 1985), pp. 23-33; Aḥmad al-

Qatāda's takeover of power marks the beginning of two decades of internal stability accompanied by territorial aggrandizement; order within the Holy City was restored; the power of the Sharifs' slaves was crushed; new fortifications were constructed; and Meccan hegemony was extended as far north as Yanbuᶜ and Madīna, and southwards into the Yemen, while the attempts of the ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh to bring Mecca into the ᶜIrāqī orbit were firmly resisted[2].

This period of stability was, however, of short duration. In 617/1220, Qatāda was murdered by his son al-Ḥasan, who then had himself acknowledged as Amir of Mecca. Al-Ḥasan's claim to the Amirate was soon challenged by his brother, Rājiḥ, and the civil war that ensued facilitated the conquest of Mecca by the Ayyūbid ruler of the Yemen, al-Malik al-Masᶜūd Yūsuf, in 619/1223. After the latter's death in 626/1229, the reins of authority in the Yemen were taken up by one of his generals, Nūr al-Dīn ᶜUmar b. ᶜAlī b. Rasūl, the founder of the Rasūlid dynasty (626/1229-858/1454). Nūr al-Dīn ᶜUmar had earlier served as governor of Mecca for al-Masᶜūd and so he was undoubtedly aware of the political and economic advantages to be derived from control of the Holy City. Thus, in 629/1232, he despatched an army to the Ḥijāz which succeeded in wresting Mecca from the control of the Ayyūbids of Egypt, to whom it had passed after the death of al-Masᶜūd. During the next twenty years, control of Mecca alternated between the Rasūlids and the Ayyūbids, although purely nominal authority remained in the hand of a succession of ineffective Ḥasanid Sharifs, who were dependent on either power for financial and military support[3].

Sibāᶜī, *Tārīkh Makka*, 4th. ed. (Mecca: Dār Makka, 1979), pp. 202-11, 221-24; Hassan Mohammed El-Hawary et Gaston Wiet, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum*, part 4, *Arabie*, Inscriptions et Monuments de la Mècque: Ḥaram et Kaᶜba, I, fas. 1 (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archeologie Orientale, 1985), pp. 93-98, 102-104, 113-16; for Qatāda b. Idrīs, see Mortel, *Aḥwāl*, pp. 35-42; al-Sibāᶜī, *Tārīkh*, pp. 224-30; ᶜAbdallāh ᶜAnqāwī, "Makka fī ᶜahd al-sharīf Qatāda al-Ḥasanī," *Majallat Kullīyat al-Ādāb—Jāmiᶜat al-Malik Suᶜūd*, 12, No. 1 (1985), 79-111; El-Hawary et Wiet, *Matériaux*, pp. 121, 123-27; for an excellent primary source, refer to Taqī al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Fāsī, *al-ᶜIqd al-thamīn fī tārīkh al-balad al-amīn* (Cairo: Maṭbaᶜat al-sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1959-69), VII, 39-61.

2) Jamāl al-Dīn Abu'l-Fatḥ Yūsuf b. Yaᶜqūb b. al-Mujāwir, *Tārīkh al-mustabṣir* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1951), I, 9-10; ᶜIzz al-Dīn ᶜAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī'l-tārīkh* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1965-6), XII, 40; Jamāl al-Dīn Abu'l-Maḥāsin Yūsuf b. Taghrī Bardī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa'l-Qāhira* (Cairo: al-Muʾassassa al-Miṣriyya al-ᶜāmma li'l-taʾlīf wa'l-tarjama wa'l-ṭibāᶜa wa'l-nashr, ?-1972), VI, 249-50; al-ᶜAnqāwī, "Makka," pp. 101-104.

3) The period of Ayyūbid-Rasūlid struggle for control of Mecca has been dealt with in a number of works; see G. R. Smith, "The Ayyūbids and Rasūlids—the

Effective control of the Amirate was not destined to return to the Banū Ḥasan until the accession of Muḥammad Abū Numayy, whose reign (654/1256-701/1301) was the longest period of internal stability and freedom from outside interference that Mecca enjoyed throughout the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods. On the other hand, it was during Abū Numayy's reign that the seeds of Mecca's future dependence on the Mamlūk kingdom were sown, originally as a Mamlūk response to the growth of Rasūlid influence in the Ḥijāz, an area which had traditionally been under Egyptian influence[4].

Since the beginning of their rule in Egypt and Syria, the Mamlūks had clearly intended to extend their control over the Ḥijāz, and it was during the reign of Abū Numayy that the basic features of the relationship between Mecca and Cairo first became manifest. One aspect of this relationship involves the use of the expression "servant of the two noble sanctuaries" (*khādim al-ḥaramayn al-sharīfayn*) in the titulary of the Mamlūk sultans. As far as it is possible to trace, it was first employed by al-Ẓāhir Baybars (658/1260-676/1277), in an inscription in the citadel of Damascus dated 659/1261[5]. During the reign of al-Manṣūr Qalā᾿ūn (679/1279-689/1290), the frequent use of this and similar phrases demonstrates that they had by then become an accepted part of Mamlūk titulary[6]. The early 9th/15th century encyclopedist al-Qalqashandī mentions it as one of the standard titles of the sultan[7].

Transfer of Power in 7th/13th Century Yemen," *Islamic Culture*, 43, No. 3 (1969), 175-80; Mortel, *Aḥwāl*, 46-50; ʿĀ᾿isha bint ʿAbdallāh Bā Qāsī, *Bilād al-Ḥijāz fi'l-ʿaṣr al-Ayyūbī* (Mecca: Dār Makka, 1980), pp. 50-58. J.C. Garcin has also summarily referred to the period of Ayyūbid—Rasūlid supremacy in Mecca with special reference to the contemporary political and economic situation in Upper Egypt in *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Egypt médiévale: Qūṣ*. (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1976, pp. 133-136. See also El-Hawary et Wiet, *Matériaux*, pp. 121, 123-27.

4) For Abū Numayy, see al-Fāsī, *ʿIqd*, I, 456-71; Mortel, *Aḥwāl*, pp. 52-63; al-Sibāʿī, *Tārīkh*, pp. 254-62; see also Garcin, *Qūṣ*, pp. 203-4.

5) Ḥasan al-Bāshā, *al-Alqāb al-Islāmiyya fi'l-tārīkh wa'l-wathā᾿iq wa'l-āthār* (Cairo: Dār al-nahḍa al-ʿArabiyya, 1957), p. 268.

6) E.g. the inscriptions dated 684/1285-6 and 687/1288-9. The second, coming from the Sultan's mosque-hospital-tomb complex in Cairo, adds the phrase, "king of the land of Egypt and the region of the Ḥijāz", Max Van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum, Egypte*, I. Memoires de la Mission archeologique français, XIX (Cairo, 1894-1903), 129, 141-42. Furthermore, in a treaty between Qalā᾿ūn and the ruler of Aragon dated 689/1290, Qalā᾿ūn refers to himself as the "Sultan of the noble and lofty house (i.e., the Kaʿba) in Mecca." See al-Bāshā, *Alqāb*, p. 270.

7) Shihāb al-Dīn Abu'l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fī ṣināʿat al-inshā* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1910-20), VI, 46.

Another aspect of the relationship between Mecca and Cairo whose origins can be traced to the age of Abū Numayy is the mention of the names and titles of the Mamlūk sultans in the sermon (*khuṭba*) delivered during the Friday prayer in the Great Mosque in Mecca and during the performance of the pilgrimage rituals. The name of al-Ẓāhir Baybars was mentioned in this way as early as 662/1264[8] and continued to be so until his death, although, on a number of occasions, the name of the Rasūlid Sultan of the Yemen, al-Malik al-Muẓẓafar Yūsuf, was mentioned after Baybars[9]. With only isolated exceptions, the Mamlūks continued to enjoy this prerogative until control of Mecca passed to the Ottomans in 923/1517.

The role of the Mamluks as "servants of the two noble *ḥarams*" was aptly demonstrated by their annual presentation of the *kiswa* to the Kaᶜba. The *kiswa*, a covering for the outer walls of the Kaᶜba, was woven of black silk, and embellished with Qurʾānic verses done in silver and gold threads, along with a dedicatory inscription incorporating the name and title of its donor. A replacement, manufactured in special workshops in Cairo, was carried to the Ḥijāz every year in the company of the Egyptian pilgrimage caravan[10]. Although the Rasūlids are known to have presented the *kiswa* several times during the second half of the 7th/13th century[11], it is nevertheless clear from a thorough reading of the sources that its manufacture and presentation had already become associated with the sultans of Cairo[12]. A number of extant *waqf* documents from the 8th/14th century contain references to revenues set aside by the sultans to cover the expenses

---

8) Shāfiᶜ b. ᶜAlī b. ᶜAbbās al-Kātib, *Ḥusn al-manāqib al-siriyya al-muntazaᶜa min al-sīra al-Ẓāhiriyya* (Riyadh: Maṭābiᶜ al-quwwāt al-musallaḥa al-Suᶜūdiyya, 1976), p. 70; Taqi'l-Dīn Aḥmad b. ᶜAlī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk li-maᶜrifat duwal al-mulūk* (Cairo: Lajnat al-taʾlīf wa'l-tarjama wa'l-nashr, 1956-73), I, 504-505.

9) al-Maqrīzī, *al-Dhahab al-masbūk bi-dhikr man ḥajja min al-khulafāʾ wa'l-mulūk* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1955), pp. 84-85.

10) Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Faḍl Allāh al-ᶜUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1924), I, 68; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, IV, 281-82; al-Fāsī, *Shifāʾ al-gharām bi-akhbār al-balad al-ḥarām* (Cairo: ᶜĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1956), I, 122-24.

11) For 659/1261, see Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ḥātim al-Yāmī, *al-Simṭ al-ghālī al-thaman fī akhbār al-mulūk min al-Ghuzz bi'l-Yaman* (London: Luzac, 1974), p. 351; for 661/1263, see *Simṭ*, p. 384; for 668/1270, see al-Fāsī, *ᶜIqd*, VII, 489; for 666/1268, see Najm al-Dīn ᶜUmar b. Muḥammad b. Fahd, *Itḥāf al-warā bi-akhbār Umm al-Qurā*, MS, King Saud Univ. Library, Riyadh, No. f 113/2, events of the year 666 (the folios of the MS are not numbered).

12) The earlest reference to the Mamlūk *kiswa* dates back to 661/1263. See al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, I, 502, who comments that it was sent from Cairo that year "as usual." Cf. also I, 703, 716 for the years 680/1282 and 682/1284, respectively.

involved in its manufacture[13]. Although the origins of the custom are uncertain, by the late 8th/14th century, the Sharif of Mecca would meet the annual caravan accompanying the *kiswa* on the outskirts of the Holy City and solemnly kiss the hoof of the camel that bore it; this action was interpreted as a sign of his submission to Mamlūk suzerainty[14].

The most important aspect of Mamlūk-Meccan relations to have its genesis during the reign of Abū Numayy is the phenomenon of Mamlūk interference in the internal affairs of the Holy City, oftentimes in response to a request from the Sharif himself. Thus, in 667/1268-9, Abū Numayy sought and obtained a document of investiture (*taqlīd*) in the Amirate of Mecca from Sultan Baybars, as well as an annual stipend amounting to twenty thousand dirhams, in return for a pledge of his allegiance to the Mamlūks, and a promise to ensure the safety of the pilgrims to the Muslim holy places which lay within his jurisdiction[15]. In the same year, the Sultan, during the course of his pilgrimage to Mecca, designated one of his amirs as his representative there, although the office was abolished not long thereafter, after Abū Numayy and his uncle Idrīs expelled the Sultan's representative[16].

Following the death of Baybars in 676/1277, and the ensuing destabilization of the internal situation in Egypt, the Rasūlid Sultan of the Yemen attempted to expand his sphere of influence to include the Ḥijāz. In response, to Mamlūk Sultan Qalā'ūn extracted an oath of allegiance to himself and his successors from the Sharif Abū Numayy in 681/1282. It deserves noting that among the promises sworn to by the Sharif of Mecca was one to drape the Kaʿba with the *kiswa* sent annually from Cairo, and not to permit any other to be so hung[17]. And when, in 687/1288, Abū

13) Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn, *al-Awqāf wa'l-ḥayā al-ijtimāʿiyya fī Miṣr* (Cairo: Dār al-nahḍa al-ʿArabiyya, 1980), pp. 105-106.

14) al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, IV, 277. The earliest reference I have found concerning this custom dates back to 788/1386; see al-Fāsī, *ʿIqd*, I, 319; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III, 554; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbā' al-ghumr bi-anbā' al-ʿumr* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-aʿlā li'l-shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1969-72), I, 318; Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd al-jumān fī tārīkh ahl al-zamān*, MS Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, no. 1584 *tārīkh*, XXIV, f. 311; Baha'l-Dīn Muḥammad b. Luṭf Allāh al-Khālidī, *al-Maqṣad al-rafīʿ al-mansha' al-hādī li-ṣināʿat al-inshā'*, MS Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, no. 21031Z, I, f. 154a.

15) Muḥyi'l-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir* (Riyadh: Maṭabiʿ al-quwwāt al-musallaḥa al-Suʿūdiyya, 1976), pp. 351-2; al-Fāsī, *ʿIqd*, I, 459; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, I, 579; al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd*, XX, f. 554.

16) al-Fāsī, *ʿIqd*, I, 415.

17) Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Bahādur, *Futūḥ an-naṣr fī tārīkh mulūk Miṣr*, MS Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, no 2399 *tārīkh*, II, f. 159; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, I, 276; El-Hawary et Wiet, *Materiaux*, pp. 140-141.

Numayy attempted to assert his independence, Qalāʾūn lent military support to his rival, the Ḥusaynid Sharif of Madīna, Jammāz b. Shīḥa, who tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to drive Abū Numayy out of Mecca[18].

During the final decade of his reign, Abū Numayy shifted his allegiance from the Mamlūks to the Rasūlids and back again several times. While some historians—al-Fāsī among them—would attribute this to his desire to secure the greatest possible financial benefit for himself and his fellow Sharifs[19], it seems probable that Abū Numayy had come to fear the consequences of the ever-increasing influence of the Mamlūks in Meccan affairs, especially as the growing disagreement of his numerous progeny over the succession to the Amirate threatened to destroy all that he had endeavored to build by inviting more vigorous and direct Mamlūk interference in Mecca. Abū Numayy therefore attempted, and with a certain degree of success, to play the Mamlūks and the Rasūlids against each other[20].

The bitter rivalry among the four most powerful sons of Abū Numayy—Ḥumayḍa, Rumaytha, Abu'l-Ghayth and ʿUṭayfa—which surfaced almost immediately after their father's death in Ṣafar 701/Oct.-Nov. 1301, gave the Mamlūks the opportunity they were seeking to tighten their grip on Mecca through direct military intervention. During the pilgrimage season of 701/1301, Abu'l-Ghayth and ʿUṭayfa sought the assistance of the Egyptian *amīr al-ḥājj*, Baybars al-Bunduqdārī[21], against their brothers Ḥumayḍa and Rumaytha, on the grounds that the latter had unjustly deprived them of their share in the rights and privileges of the office of Amir of Mecca. Baybars granted their request; he removed Humayda and Rumaytha from office and appointed Abu'l-Ghayth and ʿUṭayfa as co-amirs in their stead. When he returned to Cairo, Baybars took Ḥumayḍa and Rumaytha along with him, in chains, and they remained prisoners in Egypt for some time[22].

The situation in Mecca remained unstable, however, and the Mamlūks, during the lengthy reign of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (third reign, 709/1310-714/1341) found it necessary to resort to military force on a number of occasions in order to resolve conflicts between rival Sharifs. This

---

18) al-Fāsī, *ʿIqd*, I, 461-62; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, I, 746.

19) al-Fāsī, *ʿIqd*, I, 464.

20) al-Tujībi, a North African pilgrim who visited Mecca in 696/1297, commented on the contest for the succession in *Mustafād al-riḥla wa'l-ightirāb* (Tunis: al-Dār alʿArabiyya li'l-kitāb, 1975), pp. 306-307.

21) The importance of the Egyptian *amīr al-ḥājj* for the political history of Mecca during the Mamlūk era has been disrussed by Abdullah ʿAnkawi in "The Pilgrimage to Mecca in Mamlūk Times," *Arabian Studies*, I (1974), 146-70.

22) Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arib fī funūn al-adab*, MS Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyya, no. 549 *maʿārif ʿāmma*, XXX, f. 7; al-Fāsī, *ʿIqd*, IV, 234; al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd*, XXI, ff. 267-68.

usually took the form of the removal of one or more reigning Sharifs from office and his (their) replacement by one or more Sharifs deemed more sympathetic to Mamlūk preoccupations regarding the safety of the pilgrims and visitors to the Muslim Holy Lands[23].

The Mamlūks continued to pursue a policy of periodic direct intervention in the internal affairs of Mecca throughout the remainder of the 8th/14th and into the early 9th/15th centuries. The *amīr al-ḥājj*, the commander of the annual pilgrimage caravan, was, in most instances, the official responsible for the execution of the sultan's orders with regard to the restoration of order in Mecca and/or the appointment or dismissal of the Sharifs. On a number of occasions, the *amīr al-ḥājj* was able to reconcile the contending parties by his own efforts. Thus, in 752/1352, the *amīr al-ḥājj* Ṭaybughā al-Majdī, reconciled ᶜAjlān and Thaqaba, the sons of Rumaytha b. Abī Numayy, each of whom had attempted to gain complete control of Mecca for himself. The two of them were designated co-amirs[24]. In another case, the *amīr al-ḥājj* was compelled to rely upon the mamlūk horsemen who had accompanied him to the Ḥijāz in the execution of his task, as in 757/1356, when the Sharif ᶜAjlān entered Mecca along with the *ḥajj* and was recognized as the sole Amir of Mecca, after his brother Thaqaba had fled[25].

It is worthy of consideration that the Mamlūk presence in Mecca, until the early 9th/15th century, did not amount to a military occupation. The forces of mamlūks despatched to the Ḥijāz by the sultan in Cairo were generally small, ranging in size from 100 to a maximum of 700 horsemen, and they almost invariably returned to Cairo after the completion of limited objectives. Nonetheless, by the middle of the 8th/14th century, the appointment and dismissal of the amirs of Mecca was solely in the hands of the Mamlūks[26], while the Sharifs were usually left to themselves insofar as the day-to-day business of government was concerned.

The last decade of the 8th/14th century in Mecca was a period of increasing factional strife as several groups of Sharifs, along with their slaves and

---

23) For a more detailed account of the political history of Mecca during the 8th/14th century, see Mortel, *Aḥwāl*, pp. 65-118; also relevant is our article, "Zaydī Shiᶜism and the Ḥasanid Sharifs of Mecca," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19 (1987), 455-72. al-Nāsir Muḥammad intervened in this manner in Mecca in 704/1305, 710/1311, 712/1313, 713/1314, 715/1315, 717/1317, 718/1319, 719/1319, 720/1320, 730/1330 and 731/1330-1. Also relevant is Garçin, *Qūṣ* pp. 203-4; El-Hawary et Wiet, *Matériaux*, pp. 142-43, 144-46, 149.

24) al-Fāsī, *ᶜIqd*, III, 396; VI, 63; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, II, 858; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *Nujūm*, X, 265.

25) al-Fāsī, *ᶜIqd*, III, 397; VI, 66.

26) al-Qalqashandī has preserved a number of documents relating to the investiture of the Sharif of Mecca; see *Ṣubḥ*, XII, 233-40. See also: El-Hawary et Wiet, *Matériaux*, pp. 150, 153-54.

beduin followers, struggled to take control of the Amirate; this situation culminated in the assassination of the reigning Sharif, ʿAlī b. ʿAjlān b. Rumaytha, in 797/1395. He was ultimately succeeded by his brother Ḥasan who, at least early on in his long reign (798/1395-818/1415; 819/1416-829/1426)[27] undertook to preserve order in Mecca and its dependencies, thereby gaining the trust of the Circassian Mamlūk Sultan Barqūq (784/1382-791/1389; 792/1390-801/1399) and his son and successor Faraj (801/1399-808/1405; 808/1405-815/1412). Thus, in 804/1401-2, Sultan Faraj sent a royal decree (*marsūm*) to Ḥasan b. ʿAjlān which clearly stated that the Mamlūk amirs who arrived in Mecca on official business were to obey the Sharif's orders and to refrain from any interference, direct or indirect, in the internal affairs of the Amirate[28]. This was followed by another decree, isued in 811/1408, in which Ḥasan b. ʿAjlān was designated *nāʾib al-salṭana* (vice-sultan) in the Ḥijāz[29]. Although at first glance it would seem that the Sharif's powers had been significantly increased, since all of the Ḥijāz, including Madīna, was now made subject to his control, further reflection makes it clear that the net result of the creation of this office was to strengthen the ties that bound Mecca to Cairo. In fact, the Sharif of Mecca had become an official within the Mamlūk administration, directly responsible, in theory, to the sultan in Cairo.

The year 811/1408 marks a turning-point in the reign of Ḥasan b. ʿAjlān; in the years that followed, he became less and less able to control his sons and cousins, whose rivalries began to pose a serious threat to the safety of the pilgrims, and in 818/1415, the Sultan removed him from all his offices. Although it was not long before Ḥasan b. ʿAjlān was reinstated as Amir of Mecca, the title of "*nāʾib al-salṭana*" in the Ḥijāz was abrogated.

Factional strife and internecine warfare among the rival groups of Ḥasanid Sharifs continued to increase during the second part of Ḥasan b. ʿAjlān's reign, until in 826/1423, the Egyptian *amīr al-ḥājj*, Qurqumās al-Shaʿbānī, remained in Mecca after the completion of the rites of the pilgrimage, along with a small body of mamlūks sent by Sultan Barsbay[30]. Every year from that time onward, until the fall of the Mamlūk Kingdom, the sultan sent an amir, in command of approximately thirty Royal

---

27) For the age of Ḥasan b. ʿAjlān, see Mortel, *Aḥwāl*, pp. 119-40; al-Sibāʿī, *Tārīkh*, pp. 290-300; al-Fāsī, *ʿIqd*, IV, 86-155.

28) al-Fāsī, *ʿIqd*, IV, 97.

29) al-Fāsī, *ʿIqd*, IV, 105; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, IV, 76; al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd*, XXV, f. 283; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *Nujūm*, XIII, 74; XV, 135; Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsiʿ* (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayā, n.d.), III, 104; El-Hawary et Wiet, *Matériaux*, pp. 197-98.

30) al-Fāsī, *ʿIqd*, IV, 147; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, IV, 655, 656, 660; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ*, III, 324; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *Nujūm*, XIV, 260-61, 263.

Mamlūks, to Mecca, thereby ensuring the maintenance of order and security and resulting in the effective transformation of Mecca into a Mamlūk dependency[31].

The degree of the change in Mecca's status can best be illustrated by two inscriptions from the time of Sultan Barsbay. In the first, which comes from the *madrasa* founded by the Sultan in Cairo and bears the date 827/1423-4, Barsbay is called "servant of the two noble *ḥarams*" (*khādim al-ḥaramayn al-sharīfayn*)[32]. But in the second inscription, which comes from the *khanqa* founded by the Sultan in Cairo and is dated 835/1431-2, he is referred to as "the lord of the Ḥijāz" (*ṣāḥib al-aqṭār al-Ḥijāziyya*)[33]. The Amirate of Mecca had by then become a Mamlūk province.

Ḥasan b. ʿAjlān was succeeded in the Amirate of Mecca by his son Barakāt (829/1426-859/1455) and his grandson Muḥammad (859/1455-903/1497). Barakāt's reign witnessed the further elaboration of Meccan dependence on Egypt, as the Mamlūks began to interfere in the economic sphere. Although the Amirate was plagued by a certain degree of internal disorder during this period, its scope and effects proved to be more limited than had previously been the case[34]. With the accession of Muḥammad b. Barakāt, Mecca enjoyed the longest period of internal stability during the 9th/15th century. Although the Amirate of Mecca remained a Mamlūk dependency, Sultan al-Ashraf Qāʾitbāy (872/1468-901/1496) pursued a policy of active support for the Sharif Muḥammad and greatly expanded the range of his powers in the Ḥijāz[35], as is evidenced by the contents of a number of royal decrees (*marāsīm*) sent to Mecca during his reign[36].

The death of Muḥammad b. Barakāt in 903/1497 was followed by serious internal disturbances in Mecca, as the claim of his son and chosen successor, Barakāt, to the Amirate was challenged by a number of his brothers. For its part, the Mamlūk Kingdom was unable to intervene effectively in the Ḥijāz because it was suffering from its own internal problems subsequent to the death of Qāʾitbāy in 901/1496. After the accession of Qānṣūh

---

31) al-Khālidī, *Maqṣad*, I, f. 154.

32) Gaston Wiet, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum, Egypte*, II, Memoires de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, LII (Cairo, 1929-30), 351, 352.

33) Wiet, *Matériaux*, II, 367.

34) For the reign of Barakāt b. Ḥasan b. ʿAjlān, see Mortel, *Aḥwāl*, pp. 140-49; al-Sibāʿī, *Tārīkh*, pp. 302-307; El-Hawary et Wiet, *Matériaux*, p. 202.

35) For the reign of Muḥammad b. Barakāt, see Mortel, *Aḥwāl*, pp. 151-61; al-Sibāʿī, Tārīkh, pp. 308-309.

36) E.g., those sent in 876/1471 (ʿUmar b. Fahd, *Itḥāf*); 878/1474 (Ibid.); 887/1482 (ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ʿUmar b. Fahd, *Bulūgh al-qirā bi-dhayl Itḥāf al-warā bi-akhbār Umm al-Qurā*, MS King Saud Univ. Library, Riyadh, no. f 73/1, f. 10b); 888/1483 (*Bulūgh*, f. 15b); 891/1486 (Ibid., f. 31b); 894/1489 (Ibid., f. 49a).

al-Ghūrī (906/1501-922/1516), Mamlūk policy vis-à-vis Mecca remained passive, and the diploma of investiture was granted to whichever of the sons of the late Sharif Muḥammad b. Barakāt was able to take the office of amir by force or political wiles. After the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 923/1517, the Amir of Mecca, Barakāt b. Muḥammad b. Barakāt, proclaimed his allegiance to Sultan Salīm and Mecca thereby became part of the Ottoman Empire[37].

II. The Economy of Mecca during Mamlūk Times

Agriculture and Food Supply[38]

The medieval Muslim geographers agree that agriculture was not practised within the boundaries of the *ḥaram*, or sacred territory, surrounding Mecca[39]. The sources of the food supply for the markets of the Holy City—whose abundance and variety so impressed Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa[40]—lay in outlying areas under Meccan control, in the case of readily perishable items such as fruits and vegetables, and in regions outside the boundaries of the Ḥijāz, in the case of cereal grains.

Most of the fruits, such as pomegranates, bananas, raisins and grapes, consumed in Mecca were grown in the neighborhood of

---

37) For the last two decades of Mamlūk control of Mecca, see Mortel, *Aḥwāl*, pp. 161-72; al-Sibāʿī, *Tārīkh*, pp. 309-17.

38) The subject of agriculture and food supply has been discussed in detail in our article, "Maṣādir al-tamwīn al-ghidhāʾī li-imārat Makka, 358/969—923/1517," *Majallat Kulliyat al-Ādāb—Jāmiʿ at al-Malik Suʿūd*, 12, No. 1 (1985), 193-219.

39) al-Iṣṭakhrī, *Kitāb al-masālik wa'l-mamālik*, 2nd. ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), p. 23; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb ṣūrat al-arḍ*, 2nd. ed. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967), p. 37; Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n. d.), V, 187; Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq* (Naples, 1965-77), II, 141.

40) Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Jubayr, *Tadhkira bi'l-akhbār ʿan ittifāqāt al-asfār* (Cairo: Dār al-Taḥrīr, 1968), pp. 96-97; Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat al-nuẓẓār fī gharāʾ ib al-amṣār wa ʿajāʾib al-asfār* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1964), p. 132; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Safar-nāma*, trans. into Arabic by Yaḥyā al-Khashshāb (Cairo: Dār al-kitāb al-jadīd, 1970), p. 124; Ibn al-Mujāwir, *Mustabṣir*, I, 9. See also: El-Hawary et Wiet, *Matériaux*, pp. 171-73.

Ṭā'if[41], 99 km to the southeast of Mecca, on the eastern slopes of the Sarāt Mts. Closer to Mecca and economically much more significant was Wādī Marr, or Marr al-Ẓahrān, which lay along the pilgrim route north to Syria at a distance of 24 km from Mecca, and Wādī Nakhla, further to the northeast. Agriculture based on spring-fed irrigation was practised in both areas, which supplied Mecca with a sufficiency of vegetables and fruits[42]; on the other hand, the amount of grains—such as barley, wheat and sorghum—grown in these two areas was insufficient to meet the needs of the Holy City—particularly during the pilgrimage season—due to the fact that their cultivation depended on the unpredictable and highly erratic rainfall of the Ḥijāz[43].

The frequent droughts that plagued the Ḥijāz inevitably led to large increases in the prices of basic foodstuffs, such as happened during the period from 663/1264-5 to 669/1270-1[44], and again in 744/1343-4[45]. During some times of drought, near famine conditions in Mecca resulted in the emigration of large numbers of the poorer elements of the population, such as happened in 694-5/1294-6[46]. The most severe drought to afflict the Amirate during Mamlūk times occurred in 766/1364-5, when only a little meat and small quantities of vegetables were to be had in the markets, while basic

41) Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣurāt al-arḍ*, p. 39; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Maqdisī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm*, 2nd. ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), p. 79; al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-mushtāq*, II, 144; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, IV, 9.

42) Ibn Jubayr, *Tadhkira*, pp. 96, 98, 136; Ibn al-Mujāwir, *Mustabṣir*, I, 9; Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat al-nuẓẓār*, pp. 130, 132; al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad Ismāʿīl, Abu'l-Fidā, *Taqwīm al-buldān* (Paris, 1840), p. 95; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, IV, 248, 258-59.

43) al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, IV, 247.

44) al-Fāsī, *Shifā' al-gharām*, II, 271-72.

45) Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfī wa'l-mustawfī baʿd al-wāfī*, MS Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, no. 1113 *tārīkh*, II, f. 376a.

46) al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthat al-umma bi-kashf al-ghumma* (Ḥimṣ: Dār al-Walīd, 1956), p. 34; K. V. Zetterstéen, *Beiträge zur geschichte der Mamlukensultane* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1919), p. 38.

commodities such as cereal grains and dates disappeared completely for more than a month at a time[47].

As a consequence, the probably exaggerated picture of the quality and diversity of the food supply available in Mecca painted by both Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa must surely need to be modified. Only a small percentage of the cereals consumed by the inhabitants of Mecca was produced locally; and in many years, due to frequent droughts, even such limited amounts were unavailable. In the light of this unfavorable situation, Mecca was largely dependent on neighboring regions and nearby friendly powers to provide it with its requirements in this regard. This in turn helps to explain the otherwise puzzling fluctuations in the prices of comestibles in Mecca, as economic, political and evironmental factors prevailing in the lands which supplied Mecca all had a direct effect on the quantity and certainly the quality of its food supply, as will become apparent in what follows. Mecca derived its supply of cereal grains during the Mamlūk period from four areas: the Sarāt Mts., the Yemeni coastal plain (Tihāma), the eastern Sudan and Ethiopia, and Egypt. The importance of each area will be briefly outlined below.

The most dependable and readily accessible of these four sources was the region of the Sarāt Mts, extending into the Yemen south of Ṭāʾif. At certain times every year, especially during the Muslim month of Rajab, large numbers of tribesmen, often several thousands, of Bajīla, Ghāmid and Ẓahrān would come to Mecca, both to perform the minor pilgrimage (*ʿumra*) and to trade the wheat, barley, sorghum, millet, clarified butter, honey, almonds and raisins they brought with them for goods unavailable in their homelands[48]. Among those who commented on the importance of these tribes in the economic life of Mecca was Ibn Jubayr, who noted that many Mec-

47) al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III, 97; Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Qāḍī Shuhba, *Dhayl Tārīkh al-Islām*, MS Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, no. 392 *tārīkh*, IV, f. 176a.

48) Ibn Jubayr, *Tadhkira*, pp. 97, 104; Ibn al-Mujāwir, *Mustabṣir*, I, 21, 22; Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat al-nuẓẓār*, p. 164.

cans would purchase a year's supply of food from them; without them "life in Mecca would be full of hardship[49]." Contemporary chronicles frequently remark that the prices of key commodities fell, often quite dramatically, as soon as the tribesmen arrived[50].

Another important source of cereal grains for the Meccan markets was the coastal plain of the Yemen—the Tihāma—from where they would be shipped to Jedda by sea and then transferred to Mecca by camel caravan. Because the successful cultivation of cereals in this region was dependent on adequate rainfall, which did not always occur, the Tihāma was not a reliable source of food supply for Mecca. During periods of drought, the supply would be curtailed, and the price of grain in Mecca would increase, unless shipments were forthcoming from elsewhere[51]. Supplies from the Tihāma were also affected by the state of relations between the Rasūlids and the Ḥasanid Sharifs[52], while some of the rival Sharifian factions were not adverse to putting pressure on their opponents by preventing the transfer of shipments of Yemeni grain from Jedda to Mecca[53]. Nevertheless, Mecca's dependence on the Tihāma was at certain times so great that the mere rumor of the arrival of a shipment of grain from that region was sufficient to generate a notable decline in grain prices in Mecca, such as occured in Rajab 908/January 1503[54].

Wheat, sorghum, and millet were also shipped to Jedda, and thence to Mecca, from the East African ports of Sawākin, Berber and Zeila, which were bound to Mecca by strong political and commercial

---

49) Ibn Jubayr, *Tadhkira*, p. 104.

50) For 789/1387-8, see: Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. al-Furāt, *Tārīkh al-duwal wa'l-mulūk*, vol. 9 (Beirut: American University Press, 1942), pt. 1, 21-22; 815/1413 in: al-Fāsī, *Shifā*ʾ, II, 275; 908/1502-3 in: ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Fahd, *Bulūgh*, f. 129b; and 910/1504-5 in: *Bulūgh*, f. 144b.

51) For 815-816/1412-14, see: al-Fāsī, *Shifā*ʾ, II, 275-77.

52) Ibid., II, 272-73.

53) al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, II, 660; ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ḥusayn al-ʿIṣāmī, *Simṭ al-nujūm al-ʿawālī fī anbāʾ al-awāʾil wa'l-tawālī* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Salafiyya, n. d.), IV, 235.

54) ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Fahd, *Bulūgh*, f. 131b.

bonds[55]. The importance of the eastern Sudan and Ethiopia as suppliers of cereals for Mecca was such during the early 9th/15th century, that grain prices rose when the usual shipments were delayed or failed to arrive[56]. From a careful reading of contemporary Meccan chronicles, and also from the accounts of contemporary European travelers, it becomes clear that a vital proportion of the grain consumed in Mecca during the late 9th/15th and early 10th/16th centuries was of East African origin, most of it coming by way of Zeila[57].

The fourth major supplier of grain to Mecca during the Mamlūk era was Egypt. Since early Islamic times, the rulers of Egypt had donated large shipments of grain to the Ḥijāz. The Fāṭimids endeavored to strengthen the ties that bound Mecca and Madīna to Cairo by the provision of generous grants of foodstuffs to the Sharifs as well as the populations of the two Holy Cities at large. This policy was later continued under the Ayyūbids and further elaborated by the Mamlūks[58]. During the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries, the Mamlūk sultans frequently ordered large amounts of grain to be shipped to Jedda during times of shortage in the Ḥijāz. Thus, following a severe drought which resulted in near-famine conditions in Mecca in 722/1322, al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and several of his amirs cooperated in sending a total of four thousand *irdabb*s of wheat to Jedda, which relieved the situation[59]. In the late 8th/14th century, Barqūq is known to have designated an annual shipment of three thousand *irdabb*s of wheat to Mecca, from which eight thousand loaves of bread were made from forty *irdabb*s daily and distributed gratis to those in need[60]. In addition, the Amir Yalbughā al-

55) Mortel, "Maṣādir," pp. 203-204.
56) al-Fāsī, *Shifā'*, II, 274, 276.
57) ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Fahd, *Bulūgh*, ff. 31a, 69b, 229a; Ludovico di Varthema, *The Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema*, (London: Aymant Press, 1978), p. 39.
58) See also: Mortel, "Maṣādir," pp. 205-10; Garcin, *Qūṣ*, pp. 134, 207-8; El-Hawary et Wiet, *Matériaux*, pp. 87-88.
59) al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, II, 238; al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd*, XXIII, f. 342.
60) Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *Nujūm*, XII, 109.

Khāṣṣakī al-ᶜUmarī, one of the most powerful figures in the Mamlūk Kingdom during the latter part of the 8th/14th century, is reported to have provided a total of twelve thousand *irdabbs* of good quality wheat to the people of Mecca during the severe famine of 766/1364-5[61].

Trade and Commerce

During the Mamlūk period, the importance of Jedda—the seaport of Mecca—as an emporium on the maritime trade route connecting the ports of the west coast of India with those of the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt, increased considerably[62]. Until the early 9th/15th century, merchant vessels would sail from India to Aden driven by the winter monsoon winds beginning in November; In Aden the merchandise they carried would be transferred to other vessels deemed more suitable for navigation in the waters of the Red Sea. Those vessels, known as *jilāb* (s. *jalba*), would carry the goods as far as the port of ᶜAydhāb, on the Egyptian Red Sea coast, or Jedda. The goods involved in this trade were mostly of Indian origin—although a certain percentage had probably been transshipped from the Far East—and included cotton cloth, silks, spices—especially pepper from India's Malabar coast—musk, camphor, amber, sandelwood, pearls from the Indian Ocean, and precious and semi-precious stones, such as agate[63].

61) al-Fāsī, *Shifāʾ*, II, 274; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III, 97; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Dhayl*, IV, f. 176a.

62) For a more detailed account of the commercial importance of Mecca and Jedda during the Mamlūk period, see: Mortel, *Aḥwāl*, pp. 173-93.

63) Ibn Jubayr, *Tadhkira*, p. 96; Shams al-Dīn Abū ᶜAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Majd al-Dīn al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh al-Jazarī*, MS Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, no. 995 *tārīkh*, III, f. 12; al-ᶜAynī, *ᶜIqd*, XXV, f. 415; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tibr al-masbūk fī dhayl al-Sulūk* (Cairo: Būlāq, 1896), p. 19; Varthema, *Itinerary*, p. 19; Jean Thénaud, *Le Voyage d'Outre Mer de Jean Thénaud* (Paris, 1884), p. 64; Emmanuel Piloti de Crète, *L'Egypte au commençement du XV^e^ siècle d'après le Traité d'Emmanuel Piloti de Crète* (Cairo: Imprimérie de l'Université Fouad I^er^, 1950), pp. 9-10; cf.

Since at least the 5th/11th century, the Sharifs of Mecca had realized the importance of this trade and sought to encourage it. The customs duties (*ʿushūr*) which they levied on the merchandise passing through Jedda soon came to represent the major source of their income[64]. During the 8th/14th century, rivals of the reigning Sharif frequently resorted to interference with the Red Sea trade, either by plundering the possessions of wealthy merchants in Jedda, by preventing them from traveling on to Mecca, or by confiscating the customs duties, thereby depriving the Amir of Mecca of the greater part of his income. Thus, the Sharif Mubārak b. Rumaytha seized merchandise belonging to a number of merchants in Jedda and Mecca in 736/1335-6, in an attempt to weaken the position of his uncle, ʿUṭayfa, who was then engaged in a power struggle in Mecca with Mubārak's father[65]. And in 752/1351, the Sharif Thaqaba b. Rumaytha, who was disputing his brother ʿAjlān's title to the Amirate, gained control of Jedda and seized the customs revenues[66].

Despite these vicissitudes, the importance of Jedda in the Red Sea trade continued to increase throughout the second half of the 8th/14th century; this was due in large part to the decline of ʿAydhāb caused by the economic decline of Upper Egypt and, in particular, the increasing inability of the Mamlūk government to check the predations of the beduin tribes, which had rendered the overland route from ʿAydhāb to Qūṣ on the Nile no longer a viable alternative[67].

---

also Wilhelm von Heyd, *Histoire du commerce de Levant au Moyen-Age*, 2nd. ed. (Leipzig: O. Harrasowitz, 1923), II, 497; Subhi y. Labib, *Handelsgeschichte Ägyptens in Spätmittelalter* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1965), pp. 193-94.

64) al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, IV, 276; Labib, *Handelsgeschichte*, p. 381.

65) Ibid., II, 408.

66) al-Fāsī, *ʿIqd*, III, 396; VI, 62.

67) For the Red Sea trade during the 8th/14th century, the decline of ʿAydhāb and the rise of Jedda, see: Heyd, *Histoire du commerce*, II, 443-45; Ahmed Darrag, *L'Egypte sous le règne de Barsbay* (Damascus: Institut Français, 1961), pp. 195-200; idem., "ʿAydhāb," *Majallat nahḍat Ifrīqiyya*, 7 (1958), 53-60; Yūsuf Faḍl Ḥasan, *The Arabs and the Sudan* (Khartoum: Khartoum Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 66-79; Naʿīm Zakī Fahmī, *Ṭuruq al-tijāra al-dawliyya wa-mahaṭṭātuhā bayn al-sharq wa'l-gharb fī awākhir al-ʿuṣūr al-wusṭā* (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿāmma li'l-kitāb, 1973),

Another factor in the rise of Jedda was the decline of the overland route from the Far East to the ports of the eastern Mediterranean, after the collapse of the Īlkhānid Sultanate in Iraq and Iran in the first half of the 8th/14th century, and the depredations caused by the armies of Tamerlane later in the same century. Much of this trade was transferred to the Indian Ocean—Red Sea route.

Some idea of the size and importance of this trade can be formed from remarks made by contemporary chroniclers. We are told that the Sharif Kubaysh b. ʿAjlān confiscated merchandise valued at 600,000 gold *mithqāls* carried on board three vessels owned by Kārimī merchants in Jedda in Jumādā II 789/May-June 1387[68]. In 794/1398, forty vessels arrived at Jedda from the Yemen, carrying Eastern goods[69]. In late Ramaḍān 802/early May 1400, the Amir of Mecca, Ḥasan b. ʿAjlān, is said to have collected a large sum of money from the customs duties levied in Jedda[70]. And in Ṣafar 804/Sept.-Oct. 1401, Ḥasan b. ʿAjlān levied a duty amounting to more than 65,000 gold *mithqāls* on the contents of a vessel belonging to the Kārim which had suffered shipwreck in the vicinity of Jedda; this amounted to less than one-quarter of the total value of the merchandise involved[71].

Early in his reign, Ḥasan b. ʿAjlān undertook to protect the interests of the Yemeni merchants in Jedda from arbitrary exactions by the Sharifs[72]. He also appointed a deputy in Jedda in 806/1403-4, whose responsibility it was to organize the unloading of the merchant ships and the collection of the customs duties[73], which he

---

pp. 125-26, 133, 137-39. Especially relevant to this discussion is Garcin, *Qûṣ*, pp. 420-25, who rejects the charge that Barsbāy ordered the destruction of ʿAydhāb in 829/1426, and hypothesizes instead a gradual decline of its role in both local and international trade from early Circassian Mamlūk times.

68) al-Fāsī, *ʿIqd*, VII, 87-88.

69) Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh*, IX, pt. 1, 313; al-Fāsī, *ʿIqd*, VI, 210.

70) al-Fāsī, *ʿIqd*, IV, 95.

71) Ibid., IV, 99.

72) Ibid., IV, 90, 91, 92, 94.

73) Ibid., IV, 100-101.

reduced by one-third to further encourage trade[74]. The outbreak of hostilities between Ḥasan b. ᶜAjlān and his cousin Rumaytha b. Muḥammad in 816/1413-4 and the ensuing sack of Jedda caused a large number of the Yemeni merchants to transfer their activities to the port of Yanbuᶜ, further up the Ḥijāzī coast[75], but they were wooed back to Jedda again once order had been restored in the Amirate of Mecca in 819/1416; in that year the Sharif's revenues from the *ᶜushūr* totalled 13,000 gold *mithqāls*[76].

The year 825/1422 witnessed an important development in the history of the Eastern trade. In that year, a *nākhudā*, or ship's-captain, known only as Ibrāhīm, set sail from the southwest Indian port of Calicut and, bypassing Aden, entered the Red Sea and anchored off Jedda[77]. Ibrāhīm sought thereby to avoid the excessive taxation then being levied in Aden by the Rasūlid Sultan, al-Nāṣir Aḥmad[78], but the Amir of Mecca, Ḥasan b. ᶜAjlān, treated him harshly and confiscated all the merchandise he had brought from India[79]. This, in turn, led to Mamlūk intervention, almost exactly contemporary with their stationning of a permanent garrison in Mecca. Ḥasan b. ᶜAjlān was ordered to return the confiscated merchandise to its owners[80] and in 827/1424, the commander of the Mamlūk garrison in Mecca, the Amir Qurqumās, persuaded the *nākhudā* Ibrāhīm to unload his merchandise at Jedda, under Mamlūk protection[81]. Mamlūk control of the Red Sea trade was formalized in 828/1425, when Sultan Barsbāy appointed Saᶜd al-Dīn Ibrāhīm b.

---

74) Ibid., IV, 90.
75) Ibid., IV, 116.
76) Ibid., IV, 122.
77) al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, IV, 681, 881. This incident is also discussed in Lābib, *Handelsgeschichte*, p. 378.
78) See also: Ḥasan, *Arabs*, pp. 80-81; Heyd, *Histoire du commerce*, II, 445-46; Darrag, *Barsbay*, p. 200.
79) al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, IV, 681.
80) al-Fāsī, *ᶜIqd*, IV, 145.
81) al-Fāsī, *ᶜIqd*, IV, 148; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, IV, 681.

al-Mara as his agent in Jedda (*nā'ib*, or *nāẓir*, Jedda)[82]. This office soon became—from an economic vantage point—one of the most important offices in the Mamlūk Kingdom. Its holder was charged with the responsibility of travelling to Jedda every year in time for the arrival of vessels of the India trade, collecting the customs duties, fixed at one-tenth of the value of the merchandise concerned, and bringing these revenues back to Cairo for the Mamlūk treasury[83]. Late in the reign of Barsbāy, the sum collected amounted to more than 30,000 dinars per annum[84]. A quarter-century later, it had surpassed 200,000 dinars[85].

Needles to say, the Ḥasanid Sharifs of Mecca were powerless to prevent this sudden loss of their single most important source of income. When Barakāt b. Ḥasan b. ʿAjlān visited Cairo in Ramaḍān 829/July-Aug. 1426, Barsbāy recognized him as his father's successor in the Amirate of Mecca only after he swore not to interfere with the Sultan's revenue collectors in Jedda[86]. However, after the Banū Ḥasan and their followers threatened to disrupt the smooth flow of merchandise and revenues in Jedda, the Sultan was compelled, early in 832/late 1428, to grant one-third of the duties levies on merchandise of Indian origin to the Sharif Barakāt[87]. On the other hand, the Mamlūks did not interfere with the land trade between Mecca and Egypt, Syria, Yemen or Iraq, which was borne along with the annual pilgrimage caravans[88], or the maritime trade between Jedda and Berber; the Sharif of Mecca was allowed to retain any customs duties levied on merchandise arriving from those regions[89].

---

82) al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, IV, 680-81; ʿUmar b. Fahd, *Itḥāf*, events of 828. See also Labib, *Handelsgeschichte*, p. 380. More information on the trade monopolies of Barsbay can be found in *idem*, pp. 379-387.

83) al-Khālidī, *Maqṣad*, I, ff. 154a-b; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, IV, 707-708.

84) al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, IV, 707-708.

85) Ghars al-Dīn Khalīl b. Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī, *Zubdat kashf al-mamālik wa bayān al-ṭuruq wa'l-masālik* (Paris, 1891), p. 14.

86) al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, IV, 723; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *Nujūm*, XIV, 298.

87) al-Khālidī, *Maqṣad*, I, f. 154b.

88) Ibn Jubayr, *Tadhkira*, p. 96.

89) al-Khālidī, *Maqṣad*, I, f. 154b.

Towards the end of his reign, in 840/1436-7, Barsbāy ordered the Sharif's share of the duties levied on the India trade to be increased from one-third to one-half, but his successor, Jaqmaq, soon lowered it once again to one-quarter, in 843/1439-40[90]. Before the close of the 9th/15th century, it appears to have been increased once again to fifty per cent[91].

Because of the increasing severity of the Sultan's representatives in Jedda, who began to impose other duties in addition to the tithe (*ʿushr*)[92], a number of vessels refrained from entering the Red Sea in 837/1433-4 and transferred their cargoes in Aden once again[93]. In spite of Mamlūk efforts to counteract this tendency by imposing tariffs on Indian merchandise coming to the Ḥijāz from Aden[94], it continued to increase, with the result that the amount of revenue collected by the Mamlūks began to decline, at a time, during the second half of the 9th/15th century, when the Mamlūk Kingdom was suffering from financial instability[95]. The result was that, in 895/1489-90, Sultan Qāʾitbāy decreed that a certain percentage (not stipulated in the sources but presumably less than 50%) of the duties collected on Indian merchandise arriving in Jedda by way of Aden would revert to the Mamlūk treasury[96]. In 898/1493, the rate was fixed at 50%[97], while in the following year the Sultan announced the appropriation of all the duties collected from this source[98].

By the dawn of the 10th/end of the 15th century, it had become clear that Mecca and Jedda had lost their paramountcy as way-

---

90) ʿUmar b. Fahd, *Itḥāf*, events of 843.
91) ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Fahd, *Bulūgh*, f. 72b.
92) al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, IV, 929.
93) al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd*, XXV, f. 662.
94) al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, IV, 929-30; Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbāʾ*, III, 539-40; ʿUmar b. Fahd, *Itḥāf*, events of 838.
95) Cf. ʿUmar b. Fahd, *Itḥāf*, events of 851; ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Muḥammad al-Nīmdahī, *Kanz al-maʿānī fi'l-inshāʾ*, MS Istanbul: Reis ul-Küttap Mustafa Efendi, no. 884, f. 203b.
96) ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Fahd, *Bulūgh*, f. 53a.
97) Ibid., f. 72b.
98) Ibid., f. 76b.

stations in the India trade. In 902/1497, Sultan Muḥammad b. Qāʾitbāy ordered the Sharif of Mecca and the Mamlūk deputy (*nāʾib*) in Jedda to take all the necessary measures to compel the Indian merchants to unload their cargoes in Jedda[99]. But a policy of harsh exactions in the port, as well as serious political upheavals in Mecca itself, from 906-910/1500-05, and the sequestration of merchants' possessions in Mecca, all contributed to the decline of trade in the Amirate. Ludovico di Varthema, who visited Aden in 1503/908-9, noted that all the vessels coming from India unloaded their cargoes and paid taxes on them there[100].

Finally, two more reasons for the decline of the importance of the Amirate of Mecca in contemporary patterns of international trade can be adduced. First of all, there is the increasing restlessness of certain beduin tribes in the Ḥijāz which began to raid Jedda itself, necessitating the construction of a wall around the city in 911/1505-6[101]. Secondly, the Portuguese threat to Muslim shipping interests at the southern extremity of the Red Sea effectively prevented merchants from passing beyond Aden[102].

Coinage

The basic units of currency in Mecca during the Mamlūk period were the gold dinar and the silver dirham[103]. Ibn al-Mujāwir, who visited Mecca in 625/1277-8 during late Ayyūbid times, remarked

99) Ibid., f. 98a.

100) Varthema, *Itinerary*, p. 27.

101) See: ʿAbd al-Qādir b. Aḥmad b. Faraj, *al-Silāḥ wa'l-ʿudda fī tārīkh Judda*, MS Riyadh: King Saud Univ. Library, no. f45/4, ff. 14-17; ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Fahd, *Bulūgh*, ff. 157a, 161a, 163a.

102) See Mortel, *Aḥwāl*, pp. 191-92; Fahmī, *Ṭuruq*, p. 144; A. Kammerer, *La Mer Rouge, l'Abyssinie et l'Arabie depuis l'antiquité jusqu'au XVᵉ siècle* (Cairo, 1929-35), II, 154-59; Varthema, *Itinerary*, p. 23; Abu'l-Barakāt Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr* (Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1960-63), V, 90. The Portuguese threat is also discussed in Labib, *Handelsgeschichte*, pp. 456-57.

103) al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, IV, 275.

that gold from Egypt was struck in Mecca according to standard Egyptian measures for the dinar[104]. However, it appears that the quantities of dinars minted or in circulation in Mecca were limited, at least until the early 9th/15th century. As far as can be determined from a thorough study of the sources—published and manuscript—dealing with the Mamlūk period, the silver dirham was by far the predominant monetary unit in Mecca. The gold dinar is rarely mentioned[105].

Two types of dirhams circulated in Mecca, the round Kāmilī and the square Masʿūdī. The Kāmilī dirham was first minted in Cairo in Dhu'l-Qaʿda 622/Nov.-Dec. 1225 by order of the Ayyūbid Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil Muḥammad[106], and theoretically contained a mixture of silver: copper in a ratio of 2:1[107]. It first appears in the sources for the history of Mecca in 725/1324-5[108].

The Masʿūdī dirham, on the other hand, was composed of pure silver and valued at ⅔ of the Kāmilī dirham[109]. First struck in Mecca by the Ayyūbid ruler of the Yemen, al-Malik al-Masʿūd, between 619/1222-3 and 626/1228-9, Masʿūdī dirhams circulated until the end of the Mamlūk era[110] and are known to have been

104) Ibn al-Mujāwir, *Mustabṣir*, I, 12.

105) For the dinar in Mecca until the 9th/15th century, see al-Fāsī, *Shifāʾ*, II, 272; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, I, 804; ʿUmar b. Fahd, *Itḥāf* (Jedda: Dār al-Madanī, n. d.), III, 90, 108; ʿAbd al-Qādir b. Muḥammad al-Jazīrī, *al-Durar al-farāʾid al-munaẓẓama fī akhbār al-ḥājj wa ṭarīq Makka al-muʿaẓẓama* (Riyadh: Dār al-Yamāma, 1983), I, 645. Compare with the available data concerning the silver dirham during the same period: ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Khazrajī, *al-ʿUqūd al-luʾluʾiyya fī tārīkh al-dawla al-Rasūliyya* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Hilāl, 1911-14), I, 362; al-Fāsī, *Shifāʾ*, II, 272-73; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, I, 815; III, 97, 460; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Dhayl*, IV, f. 176a; al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd*, XXIII, f. 342; ʿUmar b. Fahd, *Itḥāf*, III, 164, 178, 180, 187, 216, 233; Zetterstéen, *Beiträge*, p. 38.

106) al-Maqrīzī, *Ighātha*, p. 66.

107) al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, III, 439. Recent chemical analysis of surviving Kāmilī dirhams shows a ratio of one-third silver to two-thirds copper in the alloy; see Paul Balog, "History of the Dirham in Egypt from the Fatimid Conquest until the Collapse of the Mamluk Empire," *Revue Numismatique*, 3(1961), 112, 130-31.

108) al-Fāsī, *Shifāʾ*, II, 273.

109) al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, IV, 276.

110) The contemporary Meccan annalist ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ʿUmar b. Fahd mentions the Masʿūdī dirham in his account of the events of 920/1514-15; *Bulūgh*, f. 223b.

minted in Mecca in 848/1444-5[111]; Rabī^c II 901/Dec. 1495-Jan. 1496[112]; and late Muḥarram 909/mid-July 1503[113].

Towards the close of the 8th/14th century in Mecca, the copper coin known as the "new *fils*", originally struck in Cairo for the first time in 795/1358, appeared in Mecca[114]. Each coin weighed one *mithqāl*, i.e., 4.25 gr.[115]. Although the Kāmīli dirham was valued at 24 new *fils* in Cairo, it was worth 48 of the same in Mecca[116].

The Venetian ducat (*ifrantī, iflūrī*), which began to displace the Muslim dinar in Cairo in the late 8th/14th century, and became the predominant gold coin in the early 9th/15th[117], first appeared in Mecca—on the basis of the available evidence—during the pilgrimage season of 815/March 1413, when it was valued at 60 Masʿūdī dirhams[118]. Shortly thereafter, its value decreased until it sold for only 50 Masʿūdīs[119]; the rate rose to 60 once again in Ramaḍān 816/Nov.-Dec. 1413[120], and eventually stabilized at 54 Masʿūdī dirhams in 819/1416-17[121]. Despite Sultan Barsbāy's decree of 829/1426, which forbade the use of the Venetian ducat in Mamlūk domains, it remained in circulation in Mecca until as late as 848/1444-5, when its value was fixed at 120 Masʿūdī dirhams, after having previously sold for 100[122].

111) ʿUmar b. Fahd, *Itḥāf*, events of 848.
112) ʿAbd al-ʿAziz b. Fahd, *Bulūgh*, f. 22a.
113) Ibid., f. 88a.
114) al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, IV, 276.
115) Ibid., III, 439-40.
116) Ibid., IV, 276; al-Maqrīzī, *Ighātha*, p. 70.
117) The Venetian ducat weighed 3.51 g, 82.5% of the weight of the Islamic *mithqāl*. For the history of the ducat in Mamlūk lands, see A. R. Van Gennep, "Le ducat vénetien en Egypte," *Revue Numismatique*, 4, No. 1 (1897), 373-81; Jere L. Bacharach, "The Dinar versus the Ducat," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 4 (1973), 77-96.
118) al-Fāsī, *Shifāʾ*, II, 275-76.
119) Ibid., II, 276.
120) Ibid.
121) Ibid., II, 277.
122) ʿUmar b. Fahd, *Itḥāf*, events of 848.

Also in 829/1426, Barsbāy ordered the replacement of the *ifrantī* by the new Ashrafī dinar, which weighed 3.41 gr., i.e., 97% of the weight of the ducat[123]. The Ashrafī first appears in Meccan chronicles in the month of Dhu'l-Ḥijja 834/Aug.-Sept. 1431[124], and remained in circulation until the end of the Mamlūk period[125]. In Rabīᶜ I 889/April 1484, its value was fixed at 300 new Masᶜūdī dirhams; it had earlier sold for four thousand old Masᶜūdīs[126]. The same rate obtained when Masᶜūdī dirhams were again struck in Mecca in Rabīᶜ II 901/Dec. 1495–Jan. 1496[127].

A new coin, known as the *muḥallaq*, is first mentioned by Meccan chroniclers in 883/1478-9[128]; it soon became the primary medium of exchange. In Rabīᶜ I 889/April 1484, the rate of exchange was decreed to be twelve Masᶜūdī dirhams per *muḥallaq* and 25½ *muḥallaqs* per Ashrafī dinar[129]; this rate did not change when new Masᶜūdī dirhams were struck in Rabīᶜ II 901/Dec. 1495–Jan. 1496[130]. By late Muḥarram 909/mid-July 1503, after the value of the *muḥallaq* had risen to 20 Masᶜūdīs, the commander of the Mamlūk garrison in Mecca, the Amir Bak Bāy, decreed that it not be sold for more than 16[131].

III. *Prices in Mecca during the Mamlūk Era*

The Nature of the Data

After the foregoing lengthy but necessary prelude, we will now devote our attention to the central theme of this article, which is the

---

123) Bacharach, "Dinar," pp. 88-89.
124) ᶜUmar b. Fahd, *Itḥāf*, events of 834.
125) It is mentioned by Ibn Iyās during the pilgrimage season of 923/Dec. 1517-Jan. 1518, after the Ottoman takeover of the Ḥijāz; *Badāʾiᶜ*, V, 227.
126) ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz b. Fahd, *Bulūgh*, f. 22a.
127) Ibid., f. 88a.
128) ᶜUmar b. Fahd, *Itḥāf*, events of 883.
129) ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz b. Fahd, *Bulūgh*, f. 22a.
130) Ibid., f. 88a.
131) Ibid., f. 137a.

tabulation and analysis of all the available data concerning the prices of foodstuffs in Mecca during Mamlūk times. The tables included below are as complete as possible—barring the unlikely discovery of hitherto unknown Meccan chronicles—but the nature of the sources themselves renders the rask of analysis of their contents rather difficult.

To begin with, until the end of the 8th/14th century, we are forced to rely on non-Ḥijāzī sources, Egyptian for the most part, although including a few of Syrian derivation, which are primarily concerned with those political developments in Mecca that bear on its relationship with the Mamlūk Kingdom in general and the safety of the annual pilgrimage caravans in particular. Information concerning economic life in the Holy City—such as the prices of foodstuffs—are only occasionally mentioned, and in the majority of instances it can be inferred that such details refer to the season of the *ḥajj*, which was very probably unrepresentative of the trend of prices during the rest of the year, because of the influx of several thousands of pilgrims into the city. As a result, it is not readily apparent to what extent such information is a reliable indication of a general upward or downward trend in the price of a given commodity over a longer period of time. This situation is only relieved with the appearance of native Meccan historians, namely Taqi'l-Dīn al-Fāsī (d.832/1429), Najm al-Dīn ʿUmar b. Fahd (d. 885/1480), and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ʿUmar b. Fahd (d. 922/1516), who recorded the prices of foodstuffs at much more frequent intervals and with greater accuracy, because they were writing about contemporary local conditions and events.

Medieval Muslim historians were not concerned with the day-to-day fluctuations in the prices of commodities in the market place. With but a few exceptions, the date they provide reflect solely what we would consider as abnormal market conditions, i.e., very high or very low prices. There are also large gaps in the record for which no data are available; during such times normal or near-normal prices probably prevailed which did not attract the attention of the

chroniclers[132]. Most of the available data concerns the prices of cereal grains, primarily wheat, reflecting its importance in the diet of the majority of the population. Significant data are also found for sorghum, millet and barley, as well as flour and clarified butter (*samn*). On the other hand, only a few items are found concerning the cost of meat, perhaps an indication that it did not figure very prominently in the diet of the ordinary Meccan. No data has been found with regard to the prices of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The task of making sense of the data available for any given commodity is made more difficult by the fact that different writers—and oftentimes the same writer—referred to different units of weight or volume. Thus, al-Fāsī's data for wheat are based on the Meccan *mudd*, the Damascene and Meccan *ghirāras*, the *irdabb* and the *rubᶜ*. Different units of currency were also used. Using the data for wheat as an illustration, we find the dinar, dirham, Kāmilī dirham, Masᶜūdī dirham, *ifrantī* or *iflūrī*, Ashrafī, and *muḥallaq*, all of which tend to predominate during particular periods. In order for meaninful comparisons to be made, we would require information regarding the changing value of a particular monetary unit over time with respect to an absolute standard, as well as the relationship of any single monetary unit to all the others. Unfortunately, such data is lacking.

Inspite of these qualifications, it is hoped that the information contained in the following tables will help to shed light on economic conditions in Mecca during Mamlūk times.

Wheat

The following table contains the available data concerning the price of wheat.

132) The same observation has been made by Ashtor regarding prices in Mamlūk Egypt and Syria; see: "La Recherche des prix dans l'Orient médieval: sources, méthodes et problemes," *Studia Islamica*, 21(1964), 113, 131; idem., "Prix et salaires a l'époque mamelouke—une étude sur l'état économique de l'Egypte et de la Syrie à la fin du moyen âge," *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 17(1949), 61-62.

Table 1
Price of wheat[a] in Mecca during the Mamlūk priod

A.H.	A.D.	Price level	Price of wheat	Source
676	1277-8	hp	2 *mudds*[b]/1 dinar	Itḥāf 3/108
late 4/676	late 9/1277	hp	1 *mudd*/1 dinar	Itḥāf 3/108
691	1291-2	–	1 Meccan *mudd*/1 dinar	Shifāʾ 2/272
695	1295-6	hp	1 Damas. *ghirāra*[c]/1200 dirhams	Zetterstéen 38
695	1295-6	hp	1 *irdabb*[d]/900 dirhams	Ighātha 34
704	1304-5	hp	1 *mudd*/20 dirhams	Khazrajī 1/362
707	1307-8	hp	1 Damas. *ghirāra*/1500 dirhams	Shifāʾ 2/272-3
719	1319-20	lp	1 Damas. *ghirāra*/120 dirhams	ʿIqd Thamīn 6/96
721	1321-2	hp	1 Egypt. *irdabb*/240 dirhams	Shifāʾ 2/273
722	1322-3	vhp	1 *irdabb*/250 (dirhams)	ʿAynī 23/342
724	1323-4	lp	1 Damas. *ghirāra*/120 dirhams	Itḥāf 3/178
725	1324-5	lp	1 Egypt. *irdabb*/18 Kāmilī dirhams (in Jedda)	Shifāʾ 2/273
728	1327-8	lp	1 *irdabb*/40 dirhams	Shifāʾ 2/273
12/744	4-5/1344	vhp	1 *irdabb*/200 dirhams	Itḥāf 3/227
12/747	3-4/1347	hp	1 *ghirāra*[c]/170 dirhams	Shifāʾ 2/273
749	1348-9	hp	1 *irdabb*/300 (dirhams)	Itḥāf 3/238
12/752	1-2/1352	hp	1 *irdabb*/300 dirhams	Sulūk 2/860-1
1/753	2-3/1352	lp	1 *irdabb*/150 dirhams	Sulūk 2/861
late 754	early 1354	lp	1 *irdabb*/130 dirhams	Sulūk 2/904
9/755	9-10/1354	lp	1 *ghirāra*/80 dirhams	Sulūk 3/10
late 760	late 1359	–	1 *ghirāra*/60 Kāmilī dirhams	Shifāʾ 2/274
early 766	late 1364	hp	1 *ghirāra*/480 dirhams	Sulūk 3/97
early 766	late 1364	hp	1 *ghirāra*/500 dirhams	Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba 4/176a
12/783	2-3/1382	hp	1 *ghirāra*/400 dirhams	Inbāʾ 1/236
793	1390-1	vhp	1 *ghirāra*/540 Kāmilī dirhams	Shifāʾ 2/274
12/794	10-11/1392	–	1 *wayba*[f]/18 (dirhams)	Ibn al-Furāt 9/2/313
12/796	9-10/1394	–	1 *ghirāra*/70 Kāmilī dirhams	Shifāʾ 2/274
12/797	9-10/1395	hp	1 *ghirāra*/330 Kāmilī dirhams	Shifāʾ 2/274
805	1402-3	hp	1 *ghirāra*/500 Kāmilī dirhams	Shifāʾ 2/274
9/815	12/1412-1/1413	–	1 *rubʿ*[g]/8 Masʿūdīs	Shifāʾ 2/275
late 9/815	early 1/1413	hp	1 *rubʿ*/12 Masʿūdīs	Shifāʾ 2/275
10-11 (?)	1-3 (?)/1413	hp	1 *rubʿ*/18 Masʿūdīs	Shifāʾ 2/275

A.H.	A.D.	Price level	Price of wheat	Source
815				
11/815	2-3/1413	hp	1 *ghirāra*/20 *inflūrīs*	Itḥāf 3/498
11/815	2-3/1413	hp	1 *rub*ᶜ/29 Masᶜūdīs	Shifāʾ 2/275
11/815	2-3/1413	hp	1 *rub*ᶜ/18 Masᶜūdīs or less (in Jedda)	Shifāʾ 2/275
6/12/815	11/3/1413	hp	1 *ghirāra*/10 *infrantīs*	Shifāʾ 2/275
9-12/12/815	14-17/3/1413	-	1 *rub*ᶜ/27 Masᶜūdī dirhams, 1 *ghirāra*/19 *infrantīs*	Shifā 2/276
13/12/815	18/3/1413	hp	1 Meccan *rub*ᶜ/27 Masᶜūdīs 1 *ghirāra*/21 *infrantīs* or more	Shifāʾ 2/276
late 12/815	late 3/1413	hp	1*ghirāra*/20 *infrantīs*, 1 *rub*ᶜ/27 Masᶜūdīs	Shifāʾ 2/276
816	1413-14	vhp	1 *ghirāra*/20 *infrantīs* (wholesale)	Shifāʾ 2/275
1-11/816	4/1413-2/1414	hp	1 *ghirāra*/9-15 *inflūrīs* usually 11	Itḥāf 3/510
3/816	6/1413	lp	1 *rub*ᶜ/about 20 Masᶜūdīs	Shifāʾ 2/276
9/816	11-12/1413	hp	1 *rub*ᶜ/16 Masᶜūdīs, 1 *ghirāra*/about 10 *ifrantīs*	Shifāʾ 2/276
12/818	2/1416	–	1.5 *waybas*/1 dinar	Sulūk 4/338
819	1416-17	–	1 *ghirāra* (l)/5 *ifrantīs*	Shifāʾ 2/277
819	1416-17	–	1 *ghirāra* (poor quality)/ 4 *ifrantīs*	Shifāʾ 2/277
822	1419-20	hp	1 *ghirāra*/12, 11.75, 10 and less, *ifrantīs*	Shifāʾ 2/277
second half of 822	late 1419-early 1420	hp	1 *ghirāra*/20 or more *ifrantīs*	ᶜIqd Thamīn 1/210
822	1419-20	hp	1 Meccan *ghirāra*/25 dinars	Inbāʾ 3/203
12/822	12/1419-1/1420	vhp	1 *ghirāra*/25 dinars	Sulūk 4/519
before 9/847	before 12/1443	hp	1 *ghirāra*/8 Ashrafīs	Tibr 74
2/855	3-4/1451	hp	1 *ghirāra*/15 dinars	Tibr 347
4/863	2-3/1459	hp	1 *ghirāra*/7.5 dinars	Itḥāf[h]
883	1478-9	vhp	1 *ghirāra*(Z)/14 Ashrafīs	Itḥāf
8/886	9-10/1481	hp	1 *ghirāra* (E)/10.5 Ashrafīs; 1 *ghirāra*/ (l)/ more than 12 Ashrafīs	Bulūgh 6b
1/11/890	10/11/1485	pi	(1 *ghirāra*)/6.5 (dinars) or more	Bulūgh 29b

A.H.	A.D.	Price level	Price of wheat	Source
2/891	2-3/1486	vhp	(1 *ghirāra*) (Z)/ app. 7 (dinars); (1 *ghirāra*) (E)/app. 8 (dinars)	Bulūgh 31a
3/891	3-4/1486	pd	1 *ghirāra* (Z)/5 (dinars)	Bulūgh 31a
5/892	4-5/1487	vlp	1 *ghirāra* (Z)/2 or more Ashrafīs; 1 *ghirāra*/ less than 4 Ashrafīs	Bulūgh 37b
late 10/893	early 10/ 1488	pi	(1 *ghirāra*)/more than 5 (dinars)	Bulūgh 43b
1/894	12/1488- 1/1489	pi	(1 *ghirāra*) (Z)/6.67- 6.75 Ashrafīs	Bulūgh 44b
4-5/895	2-4/1490	vlp	1 *ghirāra* (Z)/3.5 Ashrafīs	Bulūgh 52b
2/898	11-12/1492	pi	(1 *ghirāra*) (I)/8 or more Ashrafīs	Bulūgh 69b
3/898	12/1492- 1/1493	vhp	1 *ghirāra* (I)/8.5-9 (Ashrafīs)	Bulūgh 69b
late 11/898	early 10/ 1493	hp	(1 *ghirāra*) (Z,I)/2 *muḥallaqs*	Bulūgh 72b
late 11/898	early 10/ 1493	hp	1 *ghirāra*/11 Ashrafīs	Bulūgh 72b
early 1/899	mid 10/1493	pd	1 *ghirāra*/9 (dinars)	Bulūgh 73b
12/906	9-10/1501	hp	1 *ghirāra*/7-8 (dinars)	Bulūgh 121b
2/908	8-9/1502	hp	1 *ghirāra*/10 (dinars)	Bulūgh 129b
2/908	8-9/1502	hp	1 *rubʿiyya*/1.5 *muḥallaqs*	Bulūgh 129b
early 3/908	mid 9/1502	hp	(1 *ghirāra*)/10 (dinars); 1 *rubʿiyya*/1.25 *muḥallaqs*	Bulūgh 129b
late 3/908	early 10/ 1502	vhp	1 *ghirāra* (I, Z)/ at least 14 (dinars)	Bulūgh 130a
4/908	10-11/1502	vhp	(1 *ghirāra*)/19 dinars	Bulūgh 130a
6/908	12/1502- 1/1503	vhp	1 *rubʿiyya*/more than 3 *muḥallaqs*	Bulūgh 131a
16/7/908	20/1/1503	pd	1 *ghirāra*/11-11.75 (dinars; 1 *rubʿiyya*/1.5 *muḥallaqs*	Bulūgh 131b
late 7/908	late 1-early 2/1503	pi	1 *ghirāra*/14-15 (dinars); 1 *rubʿiyya*/2 *muḥallaqs*	Bulūgh 131b
11/1/910	25/6/1504	–	1 *ghirāra*/6.25-6.33 (dinars); 1.25-1.33 *rubʿs*/ 1 *muḥallaq*	Bulūgh 144b
11/1/910	25/6/1504	–	1.5 *rubʿiyyas* (Z)/1 *muḥallaq*	Bulūgh 144b
5/910	10-11/1504	–	1 *ghirāra* (Z)/5-7 (dinars)	Bulūgh 147a
7/910	12/1504- 1/1505	vhp	1 *rubʿiyya*/1.75 *muḥallaqs*	Bulūgh 148a
7/910	12/1504- 1/1505	vhp	1 *ghirāra*/13-14 Ashrafīs	Bulūgh 148a

A.H.	A.D.	Price level	Price of wheat	Source
11/911	3-4/1506	hp	(1 *ghirāra*)/7 Ashrafīs less 3 *muḥallaqs*; 1.12 *rubʿiyyas*/1 *muḥallaq*	Bulūgh 163a
5/912	9-10/1506	vhp	1 *ghirāra* (l)/9-10 (dinars); 1 *rubʿiyya*/1 *muḥallaq*	Bulūgh 167b
8/913	12/1507-1/1508	pd	1 *ghirāra* (l)/12 Ashrafīs; (1 *rubʿiyya*) (Z)/1.5 *muḥallaqs*	Bulūgh 175b
11/913	3-4/1509	hp	1 *rubʿiyya*/1 *muḥallaq*	Bulūgh 177b
9/917	11-12/1511	pi	1 *ghirāra*/app. 10 Ashrafīs	Bulūgh 201b
10/917	12/1511-1/1512	pi	1 *ghirāra*/app. 10.5 Ashrafīs	Bulūgh 202a
late 10/917	early 1/1512	pi	1 *ghirāra* (Z)/270 *muḥallaqs* = 12.5 Ashrafīs	Bulūgh 202b
14/11/917	3/2/1512	pd	1 *rubʿiyya* (Z)/1.75 *muḥallaqs*	Bulūgh 202b
late 12/918	early 3/1513	pi	1 *ghirāra*/220-225 *muḥallaqs*	Bulūgh 210b
9/921	10-11/1515	vhp	1 *ghirāra* (Z)/400 *muḥallaqs* = 16.67 Ashrafīs; (1 *rubʿiyya*) (Z)/2.5-2.75 *muḥallaqs*	Bulūgh 228a
10/921	11-12/1515	-	(1 *rubʿiyya*) (Z)/1.25 *muḥallaqs*	Bulūgh 229a
12/923	12/1517-1/1518	hp	1 *irdabb*/10 Ashrafīs	Ibn Iyās 5/227

[a]. Dates are recorded as given in the sources mentioned, along with their Gregorian equivalents. If the same information is given by more than one source, only the oldest is mentioned. Price levels are based on the comments of the Arab chroniclers cited. Hp = high price; vhp = very high price; lp = low price; vlp = very low price; pi = price increasing; pd = price decreasing; Z = Zeilai wheat; l = *luqaymī* wheat; E = Egyptian wheat; brackets indicate information supplied by the author.

[b]. The *mudd* = 1/40 of the *ghirāra* (Shifāʾ 2/276).

[c]. The volume of the Damascene *ghirāra* has been calculated to be 265 liters by Hinz (p. 38).

[d]. Hinz (p. 39) calculated the volume of the Egyptian *irdabbs* to be 90 liters.

[e]. The Meccan *ghirāra* equals 1¼ Egyptian *irdabbs*, according to Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (Inbāʾ III, 203), whereas al-Maqrīzī equated it with 7 Egyptian *waybas*, i.e., 1 1/6 *irdabbs* (Sulūk III, 10) and, on another occasion, 100 Egyptian *qadaḥs*, or 1.04 *irdabbs* (Sulūk III, 97). Taking 90 liters to be the volume of the *irdabb*, the volume of the *ghirāra* would lie within the range 93.5—112.5 liters.

[f]. The *wayba* is 1/6 of the *irdabb*, i.e., 15 liters (Hinz, p. 52).

[g]. The *rubʿ*, or *rubʿiyya*, is another name for the *mudd* (see Shifāʾ II, 272, 276).

[h]. The follios of the MS are not numbered: references are to the section of the MS dealing with the events of the year mentioned.

In Table 1, the prices of wheat for the period 695/1295—805/1403

are given in several different units of volume, namely the *ghirāra*, the *irdabb*, and the *wayba*. Assuming that the same type of dirham—presumably the Kāmilī—is intended in all cases, and by converting *wayba*s and *irdabb*s into *ghirāra*, using the median estimate of 7 Egyptian *wayba*s per Meccan *ghirāra*, mentioned by al-Maqrīzī (see note "e" to Table 1), the data for this period can be converted into the form displayed in Table 2, which shows the number of dirhams per one Meccan *ghirāra* of wheat.[133]

Table 2
Number of dirhams per one Meccan *ghirāra* of wheat (676/1277-805/1403)

A.H.	A.D.	Price level	Dirhams/Meccan *ghirāra*
late 4/676	late 9/1277	hp	800
691	1291-2	hp	800
695	1295-6	hp	480
704	1304-5	hp	800
707	1307-8	hp	600
719	1319-20	lp	48
721	1321-2	hp	280
722	1322-3	vhp	291.7
724	1323-4	lp	48
725	1324-5	lp	21 Kāmilī in Jedda
728	1327-8	lp	46.7
12/744	4-5/1344	vhp	233.3
12/747	3-4/1347	hp	170
749	1348-9	hp	350
12/752	1-2/1352	hp	350
1/753	2-3/1352	lp	175
late 754	early 1354	lp	151.7
9/755	9-10/1354	lp	80
late 760	late 1359	lp	60 Kāmilī
early 766	late 1364	hp	480-500
12/783	2-3/1382	hp	400
793	1390-1	vhp	540 Kāmilī
12/794	10-11/1392	-	126
12/796	9-10/1394	lp	70 Kāmilī
12/797	9-10/1395	hp	330 Kāmilī
805	1402-3	hp	500 Kāmilī

133) Ideally, the table would show the number of dinars per *ghirāra* of wheat, thereby affording a more accurate comparison between the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries possible. However, no information regarding the ration of the dirham to the dinar in Mecca has been found for the period prior to 815/1413.

The data in Table 1 referring to the period 815/1413-923/1517 can also be treated in a similar fashion, with the exception that the unit of currency is now the dinar, first the Venetian ducat (*ifrantī, iflūrī*) and later the Ashrafī. Table 3 shows the number of dinars per one Meccan *ghirāra* of wheat during this period.

Table 3
Number of dinars per one Meccan *ghirāra* of wheat (815/1413-923/1517)

A.H	A.D	Price level	Dinars/Meccan *ghirāra*
9/815	12/1412-1/1413	lp	5.6[a] *ifrantīs*
late 9/815	early 1/1413	hp	8.4[a] *ifrantīs*
10-11/815	1-3/1413	hp	12.6[a] *ifrantīs*
11/815	2-3/1413	hp	20 *ifrantīs*
11/815	2-3/1413	hp	20.4[a] *ifrantīs*
11/815	2-3/1413	hp	12.6[a] *ifrantīs* (in Jedda)
6/12/815	11/3/1413	hp	10 *ifrantīs*
9-12/12/815	14-17/3/1413	hp	19 *ifrantīs*
13/12/815	18/3/1413	hp	21 *ifrantīs*
late 12/815	late 3/1413	hp	20 *ifrantīs*
816	1413-14	vhp	20 *ifrantīs* (wholesale)
1-11/816	4/1413-2/1414	hp	9-15, usually 11, *ifrantīs*
3/816	6/1413	lp	13.3[b] *ifrantīs*
9/816	11-12/1413	hp	10 *ifrantīs*
12/818	2/1416	-	4.7 *ifrantīs*
819	1416-17	-	4 or 5 *ifrantīs*
822	1419-20	hp	10, 11.75, or 12 *ifrant*
second half of 822	late 1419-early 1420	hp	more than 20 *ifrantīs*
822	1419-20	hp	25
12/822	12/1419-1/1420	vhp	25; 11 after arrival of *ḥājj*
9/847	12/1443	hp	8 Ashrafīs
2/855	3-4/1451	hp	15
4/863	2-3/1459	hp	7.5
833	1478-9	vhp	14 Ashrafīs
8/886	9-10/1481	hp	10.5 (E); 12 (l) Ashrafīs
1/11/890	10/11/1485	pi	6.5 or more

A.H	A.D.	Price level	Dinars/Meccan *ghirāra*
2/891	2-3/1486	vhp	7 (Z); 8 (E)
3/891	3-4/1486	pd	5 (Z)
5/892	4-5/1487	vlp	2 (Z); less than 4 (I) Ashrafīs
late 10/893	early 10/1488	pi	5.12
1/894	12/1488-1/1489	pi	6.67-6.75 Ashrafīs
4-5/895	2-4/1490	vlp	3.5 Ashrafīs (Z)
2/898	11-12/1492	pi	more than 8 (I)
3/898	12/1492-1/1493	vhp	8.5-9
late 11/898	early 10/1493	hp	11 Ashrafīs (Z)
early 1/899	mid 10/1493	pd	9
12/906	9-10/1501	hp	7-8
2/908	8-9/1502	hp	10
early 3/908	mid 9/1502	hp	10.5
late 3/908	early 10/1502	vhp	14 or more (Z, I)
4/908	10-11/1502	vhp	19
16/7/908	20/1/1503	pd	11-11.75
late 7/908	late 1-early 2/1503	pi	14-15
11/1/910	25/6/1504	–	6.25-6.33
5/910	10-11/1504	–	5, 5 5, 6, or 7 (Z)
7/910	12/1504-1/1505	vhp	13-14 Ashrafīs
11/911	3-4/1506	hp	7 Ashrafīs
5/912	9-10/1506	vhp	9-10 (I)
8/913	12/1507-1/1508	pd	12 Ashrafīs (I)
9/917	11-12/1511	pi	10 Ashrafīs
10/917	12/1511-1/1512	pi	10.5 Ashrafīs
late 10/917	early 1/1512	pi	12.5 Ashrafīs (Z)
9/921	10-11/1515	vhp	16.67 Ashrafīs (Z)
12/923	12/1517-1/1518	hp	11.7 Ashrafīs

[a]. Assuming an exchange rate of 57 Masʿūdīs to the ducat (see Shifāʾ II, 276).
[b]. Assuming an exchange rate of 60 Masʿūdīs to the ducat (see Shifāʾ II, 276).

The data in Table 2 reveal a minimum price of 21 Kāmilī dirhams per Meccan *ghirāra* of wheat in Jedda in 725/1324-5 and 46.7 dirhams for the same amount in Mecca itself in 728/1327-8, during the period

676/1277-805/1403. The highest price mentioned for the same period, 800 dirhams/Meccan *ghirāra*, was recorded on three separate occasions, all at the beginning of the period concerned, i.e., late 4/676 (late 9/1277), 691/1291-2, and 704/1304-5. The range for those prices considered low by the sources is 21-175 dirhams per Meccan *ghirāra*, whereas those prices described as "high" or "very high" fell within the range 170-800 dirhams. The overlap between "low" and "high" prices demonstrates that the criteria for formation of such judgments varied with regard to time as well as from one chronicler to another.

The relatively poor agricultural resources of Mecca and its surroundings is a topic that we have already considered, as has Meccan dependence on outside sources for much of its supplies of basic cereal grains. Tables 1 and 2 contain numerous examples to illustrate these points.

One of the major causes of the increase in the cost of wheat in Mecca was drought. Since the cultivation of wheat in the Meccan region depended on adequate rainfall, drought would result in an escalation of the price of this commodity in the local market, which would then be constrained to depend totally on outside sources. And if those lands which supplied Mecca with wheat were also afflicted by drought, the predictable results would be a further increase in wheat prices in Mecca. The following examples will clarify this. The high price of wheat in Mecca in 695/1295-6 (480 dirhams/Meccan *ghirāra*) was due to a severe drought throughout the Ḥijāz, as well as the Yemen, Syria and Egypt[134]. In 721/1321-2, the price of wheat reached 280 dirhams per Meccan *ghirāra*, and then increased to 291.7 dirhams in the following year. Drought was once again the cause. Conditions in the Ḥijāz became so severe that we are told that neither dates nor clarified butter (*samn*) were available in Mecca, and no crops whatsoever were grown in Wādī Nakhla or Ṭāʾif. The crisis continued until the Mamlūk Sultan of Egypt, al-Malik al-Nāṣir

134) al-Maqrīzī, *Ighātha*, p. 34; idem., *Sulūk*, I, 813-15, 823.

Muḥammad despatched 4000 *irdabbs* of wheat to Jedda; afterwards, the price of wheat in Mecca fell sharply to 116.7 dirhams per Meccan *ghirāra*[135].

Similarly, a severe drought in the Ḥijāz in 766/1364-5 caused the price of one Meccan *ghirāra* of wheat to reach 480-500 dirhams. No grain was available in the markets of Mecca for more than a month and many people emigrated to other lands. Relief took the shape of 12,000 *irdabbs* of wheat, sent as emergency supplies from Egypt[136].

In Dhu'l-Ḥijja 752/Jan.-Feb. 1352, wheat sold for 350 dirhams/*ghirāra* in Mecca during a period of drought. After the rains câme in the following month, the price quickly fell 50%, to 175 dirhams[137].

An increase in the volume of grain imported during any giving period could also lead to a decline in the cost of wheat. Such was the case in late 754/early 1354, when the price of a Meccan *ghirāra* decreased to 151.7 dirhams, considered relatively low by al - Maqrīzī[138]. In 793/1390-1, Meccans were compelled to rely on other grains after the cost of one *ghirāra* of wheat rose to 540 Kāmilī dirhams. In the ensuing months, it dropped significantly after the Mamlūk Sultan Barqūq sent a large shipment of grain to Jedda[139]. And in 805/1402-3, a *ghirāra* of wheat sold for 500 Kāmilī dirhams in Mecca; the price began to decline only after vessels loaded with wheat from Sawākin arrived at Jedda[140].

The outbreak of hostilities between Mecca and Madina, political turmoil in Mecca itself and the deterioration of the oftentimes delicate balance of relations between the Amirate of Mecca and the Rasūlid kingdom of the Yemen, can also be adduced as causes for the high

---

135) al-Fāsī, *Shifā'*, II, 273; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, II, 238; al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd*, XXIII, f. 304.

136) al-Fāsī, *Shifā'*, II, 274; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, III, 97; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Dhayl*, IV, f. 176a.

137) al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, II, 860-61.

138) Ibid., II, 904.

139) al-Fāsī, *Shifā'*, II, 274.

140) Ibid.

price of wheat in Mecca on a number of occasions during the period covered in Table 2. From 670/1271 until at least 675/1276, the Sharif of Mecca, Muḥammad Abū Numayy, was at war with the Ḥusaynid Sharif of Madīna, Jammāz b. Shīḥa, a conflict which ended without either side gaining a clear advantage. One of the main results of this period of instability was the disruption of the caravan route between Jedda and Mecca, and a tremendous increase in the cost of wheat in the latter city, until it peaked at 800 dirhams/Meccan *ghirāra* in Rabīᶜ II 676/Sept. 1277, despite the regular arrival of shipments of wheat at Jedda from the Tihāma of the Yemen, ᶜAydhāb and Sawākin[141].

In 744/1343, ᶜAjlān and Thaqaba, sons of Rumaytha b. Abī Numayy, purchased the office of amir from their father for the sum of sixty thousand dirhams. The Mamlūk Sultan of Egypt, al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāᶜīl, refused to acknowledge this arrangement, however, and issued a decree restoring the Amirate to Rumaytha, after imprisoning Thaqaba in Cairo. Thereupon, ᶜAjlān attempted to force the abdication of his father by preventing the shipment of wheat to Mecca from the Tihāma. As a result, the cost of a *ghirāra* of wheat reached 233.3 dirhams in Mecca in Dhu'l-Ḥijja 744/April-May 1344. After the *ḥajj* season was over, ᶜAjlān agreed to lift his blockade and to accept the status quo in return for the payment of large sums of protection money by the merchants of the Ḥijāz[142].

The rice in the price of wheat in Mecca in 707/1307-8 to 600 dirhams/*ghirāra* can be attributed to the imposition of an embargo on all shipments from the Yemen to Mecca by the Rasūlid Sultan al-Malik al-Muʾayyad Daʾūd, in retaliation for the refusal of Ḥumayḍa and Rumaytha, the co-amirs of Mecca, to support his claims to hegemony over the Holy City[143].

141) Quṭb al-Dīn Mūsā b. Muḥammad al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl mirʾāt al-Islām* (Hayderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maᶜārif al-ᶜUthmāniyya, 1954-61), III, 173-74; al-Fāsī, *Shifāʾ*, II, 272; idem., *ᶜIqd*, I, 460-61; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, I, 604.

142) al-Fāsī, *ᶜIqd*, IV, 59; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, II, 660; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *Manhal*, II, f. 376a.

143) al-Fāsī, *Shifāʾ*, II, 272-73; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, II, 32-33.

Passing to Table 3, it can be seen that the lowest price for one Meccan *ghirāra* of wheat during the period 815/1413-923/1517 was two Ashrafī dinars for wheat imported from Zeila, in Jumādā II 892/April-May 1487; the highest price during the same period, 25 dinars, was recorded at the beginning of Dhu'l-Ḥijja 822/end of Dec. 1419. Almost all the data in this table refer to what the annalists considered high prices for wheat; they range from 7-25 dinars.

Many of the same factors that led to an increase in the cost of wheat in the markets of Mecca during the previous period were also operative in the later Mamlūk era, as well as others which appear for the first time. When the price of a *ghirāra* of wheat reached an all-time high of 25 dinars later in 822/late 1419, the immediate cause was, once again, a severe drought in the Ḥijāz. After the arrival of several *ḥājj* caravans which brought fresh supplied of cereal grains, the price of wheat dropped sharply to 11 dinars/*ghirāra*[144].

Any delay in the arrival of the customary shipments of wheat was also sufficient cause to force grain prices up in Mecca, while prices usually fell after the arrival of supplies. Thus, in Ṣafar 891/Feb.-March 1486, the cost of one *ghirāra* of Zeilai wheat rose to 7 dinars, while wheat from Egypt sold for 8; most of the population were unable to afford it and made bread from horse beans (*fūl*). ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz b. ᶜUmar b. Fahd, the contemporary Meccan historian who is our sole source for this information, considered these prices to be very high, and attributed the increase to the fact that no supplies had arrived at Jedda harbor. Early in the next month, after the winds in the Red Sea had shifted to a favorable direction, a number of vessels bringing wheat from the Yemen, Zeila and Berbera reached Jedda, causing a drop in the price being asked for wheat in Mecca to 5 dinars per *ghirāra*[145].

The cost of a *ghirāra* of wheat in Mecca steadily increased from 5.6 to 20.4 *infrantīs* over the period of three months extending from

144) al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, IV, 519.
145) ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz b. Fahd, *Bulūgh*, f. 31a.

Ramaḍān to Dhu'l-Ḥijja 815/Dec. 1412-March 1413. It appears that the increase was in this case due to the insufficiency of local wheat production coupled with a decline in the volume of wheat being imported, an hypothesis substantiated by the sudden drop in the price of wheat to 10 *infrantīs*/Meccan *ghirāra* on 6 Dhu'l-Ḥijja/3 Nov., following the arrival of the Banū Bajīla of the Sarāt Mts. south of Mecca, for the pilgrimage[146]. The Bajīla, as noted above, were traditional purveyors of cereals and other foodstuffs to the Holy City.

Similarly, the price of a Meccan *ghirāra* of wheat gradually increased from 10-19 dinars during the first half of 908/late 1502-early 1503, then plunged to 11-11.75 dinars on 16 Rajab/20 January after the arrival of a shipment of grain at Jedda. The shipment concerned must have been a small one, since prices rose dramatically only a few days later, and then fell to 14-15 dinars with the arrival of the Bajīla for the minor pilgrimage (*ᶜumra*) towards the end of Rajab/January[147]. It is worthy of note that at least since the time of Ibn Jubayr in the 6th/12th century, these and other tribesmen of the mountainous regions lying to the south of Ṭāʾif brought supplies of grain with them to sell in Mecca during the month of Rajab[148].

Again, the cost of a *ghirāra* of wheat fell to 6.25-6.33 dinars in Mecca on 11 Muḥarram 910/25 June 1504, due to the arrival of supplies with the Bajīla[149]. And the arrival of a shipment of wheat at Jedda harbor in Dhu'l-Qaᶜda 917/Feb. 1512, caused the price being asked for one *rubᶜiyya* of wheat in Mecca to fall from 1.75 *muḥallaq*s to one *muḥallaq* and two dirhams[150].

Throughout much of the 9th/15th century, Mecca had enjoyed unprecedented internal stability, which can be attributed to the strong personalities of the ruling amirs and their long reigns as well as to direct Mamlūk occupation. Upon the death of the Sharif

---

146) al-Fāsī, *Shifāʾ*, II, 276.
147) ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz b. Fahd, *Bulūgh*, f. 131b.
148) Ibn Jubayr, *Tadhkira*, p. 97.
149) ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz b. Fahd, *Bulūgh*, f. 144b.
150) Ibid., f. 202b.

Muḥammad b. Barakāt in 903/1497, the succession of the Amirate was disputed by several of his sons, ushering in more than a decade of near anarchy, which had dire effects on economic conditions in Mecca, not excluding the prices of agricultural commodities. During the struggle between two of these sons, Hazzāʿ and Barakāt, during the latter half of 906/mid 1501, the caravan routes to Mecca were frequently severed and the transfer of goods rendered impossible, causing a notable increase in the cost of wheat in the Holy City[151]. In Rajab 910/Dec. 1504-Jan. 1505, the Amirate was in the hands of another of Muḥammad b. Barakāt's sons, the Sharif Qāʾitbāy. During that month, Qāʾitbāy's brother and chief rival, Ḥumayḍa, entered Mecca accompanied by a large contingent of his tribal allies, ostensibly on their way south to the Yemen. Their presence, although it proved to be both peaceful and of short duration, caused the price of wheat to rise to 13-14 Ashrafī dinars per one Meccan *ghirāra*, as many members of the Meccan mercantile community temporarily abandoned the city, while no caravans of supplies arrived, for fear of Ḥumayḍa's possible confiscation of merchandise[152].

As indicated earlier, the breakdown of central authority in Mecca during the early 10/16th century, afforded an opportunity for a number of the beduin tribes of the Ḥijāz to break away from the control of Mecca. Some of the more powerful of these tribes, such as the Banū Ibrāhīm, began to attack and pillage trade caravans. In Rabīʿ II 908/Oct.-Nov. 1502, they intercepted one such caravan which was bound for Mecca, forced the merchants accompanying it to sell them the wheat they were carrying at low prices, and then proceeded to Mecca where they resold it to the population at highly inflated prices, as much as 19 dinars per *ghirāra*[153].

Price-fixing was also engaged in by the Sharifs and their allies. In Dhu'l-Qaʿda 911/March-April 1506, a Sharifian ally of Barakāt b.

---

151) Ibid., f. 121b.
152) Ibid., f. 148a.
153) Ibid., f. 130a.

Muḥammad b. Barakāt, the brother and rival of the reigning Amir of Mecca, Qā'itbāy b. Muḥammad, purchased a substantial shipment of wheat in Jedda and then resold it in Mecca at a handsome profit, causing the price of wheat there to increase to 7 Ashrafi dinars/*ghirāra*[154].

The main conclusions to be drawn from the available information regarding the price of wheat in Mecca during Mamlūk times is that its level depended on two primary variables: the level of rainfall in the Ḥijāz in any given year, and the amount and time of arrival of imported wheat, on which Mecca was largerly dependent. These variables should also operate in the case of other cereals; Table 4 contains the available data for sorghum (*dhura*).

Sorghum

With only three exceptions, the information available to us concerning sorghum reflects only high or very high prices; they range from 100-400 dirhams per Meccan *ghirāra* during the 8th/14th century, and from three *infrantīs* to 30 gold *mithqāls* during the 9th/15th century. The lowest price recorded for sorghum was 40 Kāmilī dirhams/Meccan *ghirāra*, sometime during the lifetime of the historian al-Fāsī (d. 832/1429).

Although the data obtainable for sorghum is less than that available for wheat, it is still possible to determine that many of the same factors that were responsible for increases in the price of the latter commodity also affected the cost of the former in the markets of Mecca. Thus, the drought of 707/1307-8, which caused the price of one Damascene *ghirāra* of wheat to reach 1500 dirhams in Mecca, also explains the rise in the cost of the same volume of sorghum to more than 900 dirhams[155]. During the drought of 766/1364, the price of a

---

154) Ibid., f. 163a.
155) al-Fāsī, *Shifā'*, II, 272-73.